



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Science

of

**AMBAR ABRAR**

MBA (Institute of Business Management, Pakistan, 2011)

**“Anxiety among women experiencing medically complicated pregnancies: A systemic literature review”**

Social Dimensions of Health

Tuesday, April 17, 2018

10:00 A.M.

University Centre Building

Room A207a

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Andre Smith, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Nichole Fairbrother, Department of Psychology, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Amanda Skoll, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of British Columbia  
(Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Karen MacKinnon, School of Nursing, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Jodie Gawryluk, Department of Psychology, UVic

## **Abstract**

**Background:** Medical complications in pregnancy can be a significant source of stress for pregnant women and their partners. Despite this, and evidence that anxiety is very common among perinatal women, little is known about the relation of perinatal anxiety and medical complications in pregnancy.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research was to conduct a systematic review of the extant literature pertaining to medical complications of pregnancy and anxiety. Specific objectives were to investigate differences in anxiety experience (symptoms and/or disorder) between women experiencing a medically complication pregnancy and women experiencing a medically uncomplicated pregnancy, as well as the nature and scope of perinatal anxiety among women whose pregnancy is fraught with medical problems.

**Methods:** The review was guided by the PRISMA reporting process. The electronic databases MEDLINE and PsycINFO were searched to identify studies that met the study inclusion criteria. Data were extracted and presented in narrative form including tables and figures. An adapted form of the Newcastle-Ottawa Quality Assessment Scale for case-control and cohort studies, was used to perform a quality assessment review.

**Results:** Twelve studies met the inclusion criteria. This included eight case-control studies. Findings indicated that anxiety symptoms were significantly higher among women experiencing a medically complicated pregnancy compared to those experiencing an uncomplicated pregnancy. The cohort studies compared anxiety symptoms at various time points among women experiencing a medically high-risk pregnancy and reported highest levels at initial assessment. Though, an exact estimate cannot be provided due to the methodological differences, but these studies reported the prevalence rates of anxiety symptoms to range between 7.8% to 46.9%. The included studies that used DSM-IV criteria concluded that the risk may be most significant for two disorders: obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Based on the overall quality of the available studies, the findings cannot be called as bias-free

**Conclusions:** Women experiencing a medically complicated pregnancy appear to experience significantly more symptoms of anxiety compared to women experiencing a healthy pregnancy.